

Paul Lansky

(b. 1944)

More Than Idle Chatter

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| 1 | Idle Chatter (9:26)
<i>voice: Hannah MacKay</i> |
| 2 | Word Color (12:52)
<i>reader: Hannah MacKay; text: Walt Whitman</i> |
| 3 | just_more_idle_chatter (8:43)
<i>voice: Hannah MacKay</i> |
| 4 | The Lesson (6:18)
<i>text and voice: J.K. Randall</i> |
| 5 | Notjustmoreidlechatter (7:57)
<i>voice: Hannah MacKay</i> |
| 6 | Memory Pages (13:10)
<i>text and readers: Paul Lansky, Hannah MacKay</i> |

Total Time: 59:00

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Notes by the Composer

The six pieces on this disc all play with the music in speech. Some are content to chew on the garrulous sounds of people chattering away, while others, to varying degrees, worry about what the words actually mean. To my ear speech and song are not mutually exclusive: there is music in speech, and speech in song. These pieces are explorations along this terrain. In the end, I hope the listener comes away with a heightened sensitivity to the music of speech. If, on the other hand, what mainly emerges is a musically good and interesting time—well, that's fine too.

Idle Chatter, **just_more_idle_chatter**, and **Notjustmoreidlechatter**, are three sister pieces which explore the same territory from different points of view. They are not intended as a suite, and would probably be exhausting to listen to as such—which is why they are not placed consecutively on this disc—but as three distinct and different pieces which happen to have a lot in common. (They also attempt to have some fun in a musical domain—computer music—which is prone to great seriousness, sometimes bordering on despair.) The voice in all three pieces is that of Hannah MacKay.

The incoherent babble of **Idle Chatter** is really a pretext to create a complicated piece in which you think you can 'parse the data', but are constantly surprised and confused. The texture is designed to make it seem as if the words, rhythms and harmonies are understandable, but what results, I think, is a musical surface with a lot of places around which which your ear can dance while you vainly try to figure out what is going on. In the end I hope a good time is had by all (and that your ears learn to enjoy dancing).

just_more_idle_chatter was written as a response to the responses I got to **Idle Chatter**. I was quite surprised, first, by how much feedback I got, and second, by

the fact that very few people heard the same things in the piece. In this piece the chorus of 'background singers' is given more work to do, the harmonies become a little more complicated, and the motions of the piece stop and start a bit more, but the basic idea is the same.

Finally, **Notjustmoreidlechatter**, is a stubborn refusal to let a good idea alone. Here, in mid-piece, the chattering becomes almost intelligible and speech-like, further tempting the listener to attempt comprehension, but then retreats to its customary babble. The background singers have by now learned how to sing counterpoint, however, and assume an even more commanding role in the ensemble.

Word Color is based on the sense that words, as sounds, can ring, and have resonance in our memory. While that resonance may be regarded as purely sonic, words themselves inevitably reach more deeply into other areas of our consciousness. The music in this piece therefore consists of a number of arbitrary words, simply ringing in sonic space, and also a setting of a passage from Walt Whitman's **Song of Myself** (verse 17). The two 'contexts' engage in a dialogue in which meaning is inferred rather than made explicit. The piece was first played at a festival in Delphi, Greece. The reader is Hannah MacKay.

*These are really the thoughts of all men in all ages and lands,
they are not original with me,
If they are not yours as much as mine they are nothing, or next to nothing,
If they are not the riddle or the untying of the riddle they are nothing,
If they are not just as close as they are distant they are nothing.*

*This is the grass that grows wherever the land is and the water is,
This the common air that bathes the globe.*

The Lesson was written for the 60th birthday of J.K. Randall, a composer and musical thinker of real brilliance and originality. Jim was on the faculty at Princeton for many years and his compositions, teaching and writing have had a substantial influence on many of us. **The Lesson** is based on a conversation with him in which we discussed some well-known music. In the piece, however, the order of statements (mine are removed) is arbitrarily shuffled so that the meaning becomes blurrier, and the implications more extensible. A mildly chromatic harmonic language threads the statements into a texture which articulates the rhythm of the phrases, and colors their meaning. As in the 'chatter' pieces, it is necessary to lean forward to take in the words and music, and this effort is part of the experience of the piece. A careful listener will eventually get the gist of his thinking, but that doesn't really matter: for those not particularly interested in Jim's arguments it should be good just to go along for the ride.

Memory Pages: We've all had the experience of having a sound, smell, image, or taste, trigger a long buried memory so vividly that it almost seems as if we are reliving the experience. It is such a remarkable sensation that it inevitably moves us deeply, but we can never share it, only marvel, as Proust did when the taste of a madeleine flooded his consciousness with memories of Combray. It's often a painful experience as we feel the permanence of the loss of the past, and are stunned by how real our perception is, despite this irretrievable loss. **Memory Pages** is a musical excursion into this realm. The text is comprised of a few personal memories my wife Hannah MacKay and I have had, along with thoughts about remembering and the passage of time. At the piece's end, and the end of this disc as well, an odd setting of a well-known Australian folksong rings down the curtain, much like the titles at the end of a film, giving the listener a chance to reflect, and make the transition back to the theater lobby.

Idle Chatter was created on an IBM 3081 mainframe in 1985.

just_more_idle_chatter and **Notjustmoreidlechatter** were made on a DEC MicroVaxII in 1987 and 1988, respectively. All three 'chatter' pieces use a technique known as Linear Predictive Coding, granular synthesis and a variety of stochastic mixing techniques. **The Lesson** was made on a MicroVaxII in 1989 using plucked string synthesis, comb filters and granular synthesis. **Word Color** and **Memory Pages** were made using a NeXT computer in 1992 and 1993 employing similar techniques. All pieces were written in a computer-music language called **Cmix**. The pieces were all digitally transferred for mastering so every copy of this CD contains the digital originals of these pieces: there are no 'copies'. (This may not seem like a big deal, but it is.)

Paul Lansky

Hannah MacKay, studied acting at the High School of Performing Arts and with Lee Strasberg, and has worked professionally in film, television and radio. She also pursues an active interest in classical languages in literature. Married to Paul Lansky, she has been the 'voice' of a number of his pieces.

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Other CDs by Paul Lansky:

Smalltalk, New Albion Records, NA030CD: *Smalltalk, Guy's Harp, Late August, Not So Heavy Metal.*

Homebrew, Bridge Records, CD 9035: *Table's Clear, Night Traffic, Now and Then, Quakerbridge, The Sound of Two Hands.*

Fantasies and Tableaux, CRI CD 683: *Six Fantasies on a Poem by Thomas Campion, Still Time.*

in collections:

Hop: (marimba and violin) *Combo Platter*, Marimolin, BMG/Catalyst 62667-2.

As If: (string trio and tape) *The Virtuoso in the Computer Age-I*, Trio Fervor, Centaur Records CRC 2110.

Stroll: (chamber ensemble and tape) *The Composer in the Computer Age—III*, The North Texas Chamber Players, Centaur Records, CRC 2213.

Wasting: (tape, with Brad Garton, Andy Milburn) *Inner Voices*, Centaur Records CRC 2076.

Idle Chatter originally appeared on *New Computer Music*, Wergo 2010-50; *just_more_idle_chatter* on *Inner Voices*, Centaur CRC 2076, and *Notjustmoreidlechatter* on *Electro Acoustic Music 1*, Neuma Records 450-73. These pieces have all been resampled and remastered from the original digital sources for this recording.

